

November 30, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20571

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has failed to make timely, accurate housing payments owed to veterans under federal law, and we are deeply concerned that the Department still has not shown a credible plan to correct these failures. We expect all veterans to receive the full benefits to which they are entitled under the Harry W. Colmery Educational Assistance Act of 2017, or “Forever G.I. Bill,” and for VA to make them whole to these legally-required payment amounts as soon as possible.

There is no excuse for our nation’s veterans to not receive the full amount of what they have earned and have been promised through the G.I. Bill. VA faces ongoing implementation challenges with the Forever G.I. Bill, including staffing shortages, IT system deficiencies, and the length of time necessary to determine the correct amount owed to each veteran; however, we believe these issues should have been addressed. Reforms must be undertaken with urgency. Strong and capable leadership will be essential to that task and we urge your close and personal oversight.

While we are aware of your public statement of November 29, VA has been otherwise unable to articulate a plan for making the required payments. Further, the Department’s overall tone has been dismissive of statutory requirements with which VA is obligated to comply. VA must make accurate, timely payments that are consistent with all requirements of the Forever G.I. Bill, including the statutory deadlines.

We owe it to those who have transitioned out of the military and are pursuing further education to support them completely. The delays that student veterans and their families have already experienced have created a real crisis to not only their long-term education and career goals, but also their daily needs. Late payments of the Basic Allowance for Housing have reportedly created late fees, interest, unnecessary loan debt, relocation expenses, and potentially even eviction for some veterans. Now, underpayments will present veterans and their families with yet another challenge. VA’s indifference to these burdens is shocking and unacceptable.

Some of us have requested updates on VA’s progress toward reducing the number of education claims pending, the average wait time for payment of any education benefit claims by type of claim, the number of regular or contract full-time equivalent (FTE) employees currently working to resolve IT failures, and the total number of FTEs receiving overtime pay for implementation. To date, VA has failed to provide this information or respond to our inquiries. We expect this

information to be provided immediately. VA must be transparent and accurate in requesting the resources needed to carry out its mission.

Congressional oversight of these issues will continue until every veteran receives the benefits they have earned in their service to our country. We hope to work with you and VA to ensure this issue is addressed as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Doug Jones
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator